

Ardmore ; Its Founder and Early Christian Memorials



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Ardmore ; Its Founder and Early Christian Memorials

by

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CHAPTER I.

The "Lives" (as they are styled) of the early Irish saints constitute a very distinctive branch of our ancient literature, the peculiar characteristics of which have not yet been fully studied by scholars. They contain, on their surface, a large element of myth and evident romance but, underlying this, there is a solid foundation of fact which it is the critic's office to disencumber from its concretion of legend. How the myth came to attach itself to the historical the present is no place to enquire; suffice it to say that fact and fable are, to a certain degree, blended in most ancient chronicles. In the case of our old Irish narratives it may be laid down as the general rule that the more ancient the accounts in question are the more sane and credible they read. The earliest documents are comparatively free from legend; growth of the latter—as De La Haye ("Legends of the Saints") has shown—belongs to a later stage of the "Life" and is a gradual process under the influence of factors none too difficult to trace. They do, therefore, a real disservice to truth, Irish History and the venerable saints of Ireland, who edit the "Lives" as if everything the documents contain were accepted fact.

"Lives" of many Irish saints (Declan of Ardmore among them) have come down to us in manuscript form from a period anterior to the invention of printing, and the intelligent reader will naturally want to know what authority, if any, the ancient documents have, when and by whom they were

4 *Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials*

compiled in their present forms and what were their original writers' sources of information. Reply to these questions need not unduly delay us. The ancient "Lives" possess no authority beyond this—that they are many centuries old, that they were written by serious and learned men from religious motives, and that the writers had before them older documents which have since perished. On the whole it seems most likely that the "Lives," as we now have them, were compiled, as a rule, somewhat about the 11th or 12th century, and that their purpose was to serve as reading material in the monasteries. The "Lives" would naturally have been copied and re-copied during the centuries up to the 16th, and the successive scribes would have modernised the language up to date, besides adding occasional details, explanations and observations of their own. The object of the original compilers was less to teach history than to edify simple souls. Hence the stress which they lay upon the supernatural and the miraculous, while they almost ignore the merely human. The saint as he is is presented to us in the ancient "Life" is something of a demi-god, when we should much prefer an actual sketch of the man. It will be borne in mind that the ancient biographers were separated from the saints' time by many centuries—by as long a period, in fact, as that which separates us from the writers. They could, therefore, have no first-hand information about the facts they record; this, however, is no argument against the writers' authority and veracity.

Some of the ancient "Lives" aforesaid are written in Irish and others are in Latin, and of certain saints (a score or so) we have two, or more, independent "Lives"—one in Latin, the other in Irish, and evidently written by different authors from different material. For the vast majority of Irish saints, however, there are no formal "Lives;" the few facts known about these servants of God we glean from occasional references in the history of other saints or in the old Irish martyrologies. Sometimes, too, the "Life" survives in several ancient copies in different libraries but often, as in our Declan's case, only a single copy has come down. Declan's "Life" referred to is preserved in a vellum manuscript belonging to the Royal Library at Brussels, and this is in the late 16th century hand of Brother Michael

O'Clery, who, it will be recalled, was the chief of the Four Masters. It is from the text in question that the following account of our saint is taken; the reader who wishes to study the matter more fully should consult the present writer's "Life of St. Declan," published by the Irish Texts Society, Vol. XVI., 1914.

All authorities are agreed that the period of Declan was very early. But how early, exactly? The view that Declan preceded St. Patrick has been growing year by year in popularity till to-day it may be called the generally accepted theory. Formerly, and not so very long ago, it was regarded as almost a disparagement of Patrick to suggest that Declan had been his forerunner in the Irish mission field. Modern scholarship and deeper study of the matter has, however, shown that Declan's priority is now highly probable—notwithstanding the opinion to the contrary of the learned Lanigan. Dr. Lanigan, by the way, had not before him the evidence we possess to-day of close relations between Ireland, Gaul, and Britain (Wales) in the fourth century A.D. So closely, in fact, was Ireland in touch with the neighbouring coasts of Britain and the Continent that it would have been a very wonderful thing indeed if the new faith had not found some entrance before the fifth century. Leoghaire's druids had evidently ample opportunity to acquire the knowledge which they showed of Christian tenets and practices.

There are few spots in holy Ireland that make so stirring an appeal to the Irish soul as venerable Ardmore with its mute memorials of a dimly glorious past. Standing on this almost sacred ground what son or daughter of Ireland does not feel the heart aglow? The sensation, to be sure, is tinged with melancholy—the sadness which springs from contemplation of vanished greatness or of storied ruins. That masonry-capped well on the lonely cliff!—it recalls the calm evening of Declan's life, when, the saint's earthly work completed, he retired to his little desert to spend his remaining days in heavenly communings. That rude Oratory in the lone graveyard is the earliest surviving ecclesiastical monument in County Waterford, and perhaps in all Munster; the people call it *An beannachán*, and within it the remains of their tribal apostle were laid to rest. That stately Round Tower and ruined Cathedral!—they are weighted with the

6 *Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials*

hoary antiquity of seven hundred years; yet they are modern compared with the *beannachán*. To the great church of Ardmore were carried for burial the bodies of chieftains and of high ecclesiastics, whose gravestones—their inscriptions, if they ever had any, long since effaced—are still to be seen within it. Beneath the shadow of the great tower rested in bygone days many a weary pilgrim who had come to discharge his obligations at Declan's holy shrine. That line of dark-brown hills bounding the view to the north!—it is the Druim Finghin of Irish legend alluded to in the Four Masters, under date, A.M. 3502, as one of the celebrated hills of Ireland for possession of which Eremon the Milesian quarrelled with his brother Eber. Most likely the Ardmore peasant or fisherman will not recognise the ridge under its classic title, but its modern name, Slieve Grinn, will be quite familiar to his ears.

His "Life" claims for St. Declan that the founder of Ardmore preceded St. Patrick in his mission, and as we have already seen there is no sufficient reason to reject the claim. To be sure the "Life" is late—that is, it is, in its present form, centuries later than Declan's time; moreover, it abounds (though by no means to the same extent as Lives of other Irish saints) in incredible stories, absurdities, contradictions and anachronisms. These and other such disabilities notwithstanding, the main narrative is not only credible but almost certainly true. This is hardly the place for detailed examination of a difficult historical question: In corroboration of the claim for the pro-Patrician apostolate of Declan attention may be called to the remarkable fact that Patrick never entered or at least never evangelised, the important territory of the Decies. Neither is he recorded to have sent missionaries into the latter nor to have committed it to any of his disciples. The previous preaching of Declan supplies a reason: Christianity had already found entrance and made progress, and Patrick, whom many unevangelised regions still awaited, had no time for preaching to the already converted. The "Life," of which the Irish original is, or was a few years since, at Brussels, gives dates only by implication: it would place the birth of our saint somewhere towards the close of the fourth century. The late Rev. Dr. Henebry, with great display of learning, argues (*Ivernian Journal*, vol.

VII. pp. 123, etc.) eloquently in favour of a still earlier (third century), and by no means impossible, mission.

The short, rocky and somewhat elevated headland which juts seaward in an easterly or south-easterly direction, four or five miles east of the Blackwater estuary, is locally known as Ardmore Head, or *Ceann a Ráma*. On the land side the clay cliff curves to north and east leaving, between its arc and the rocky promontory, the shallow Bay of Ardmore, wherein more than one good ship has met her doom. On the north, or bay, side of the iron headland, sheltered from all southern and western gales, nestles the modern village with its striking group of ancient ecclesiastical remains—one of the most remarkable things of its kind in Ireland. There is the great church or Cathedral, a primitive oratory, a later ruined church beside a Holy Well, two ogham inscribed pillar stones and some monuments of lesser note. Overlooking all, in solitary, solemn grandeur, rises a stately Round Tower—the best preserved and the finest monument of its kind existing. Taken altogether—with the historic associations which cling to it, the halo of romance which hallows it, its silent witnesses of Ireland's glorious past, its picturesque situation and primitive atmosphere—Ardmore is easily the most interesting spot in all broad Decies.

According to the ancient "Life," which we may regard as having been cast in its present form about the 12th century, or nearly eight hundred years ago, Declan first saw the light at a place which has been identified as the present Drumroe, near Cappoquin. We have it on authority of the same document that he received Christian Baptism, upbringing and instruction within his native territory. All this pre-supposes the existence of Christianity, or of a Christian community, in Waterford, a quarter of a century, at least, before the preaching of Patrick. One Colman, a priest, is stated to have baptised the infant. Colman afterwards became a Bishop, and local tradition has ever associated him, as its founder, with the Church of Kilcolman in the present Old Parish. Nothing now survives of Kilcolman church—probably, indeed, it was of wood—but its former site is well known and is held in popular veneration, as is the thorn-bush which overshadowed the Holy Well, now drained away. On a grass-covered mound, beside the well, there lay the

8 *Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials.*

reputed stone chalice of the saint; this curious object is now preserved in the Museum of University College, Cork. Probably the vessel's present worn condition is the result of its use for ages as a "healing stone" in cases of cattle disease. When, whence or how Colman received the Faith we know not. We may infer that he travelled to Gaul or Britain, and was converted there, or that some daring Christian from overseas, whose good deeds are unrecorded save in the Book of God, had baptised and instructed him. As a matter of fact, we know that fugitive Christians in some numbers had fled to Ireland to escape the Diocletian persecutions of the third century. Unfortunately we have hardly any reliable details of Declan's work; we lack likewise personal details—such as the world loves to hear of its heroes. Declan's ancient biographers were so intent on deifying their holy patron that they have forgotten to draw a picture of the man. The "Life" is a fairly long document, but its value is mostly archaeological; it sheds light on ancient institutions, describes some early Christian practices, and names a number of places which it is still possible for us to identify. It is not exactly history, although there is history embedded in it; it recounts a multitude of alleged miracles, and it succeeds in exhibiting the saint as largely a (sometimes—resentful) necromancer rather than a patient disciple of the Cross. All this is, however, according to the 12th century notion of religious biography. We should give a great deal to-day for some first-hand information of a personal character—the manner of man our saint really was, his virtues, his methods, his sayings, details of his work and so forth.

Among the marvels related of Declan the following may be quoted, either because they are characteristic or because they have left a living memory in the place-names of Decies. The site of Declan's church at Ardmore was originally an island called *Ard na gCaorach*; this he miraculously enlarged and joined to the mainland by compelling the sea to fall back a certain distance from the beach. So swiftly were the waters driven out that fishes and writhing creatures of the deep were left behind on dry land. *Mainchiin* (possibly the future founder of Kilmanahan, near Clonmel) a young cleric of Declan's household, was so frightened that

he cried out in terror. The youth's interruption displeased the saint, who, turning around, struck its author lightly on the nose. Three drops of blood, the biography gravely tells us, fell from the wound, and from the place where they touched the earth three separate springs of pure water gushed forth. Apparently the sea has advanced again since then for the three springs are to-day, or were till recently, pointed out on the strand at, or near, the extreme low-water mark of spring tides. The waters of these springs, by the way, are claimed to cure internal complaints of those enterprising enough to use them. On another occasion the saint raised to life seven noble hostages who had died of the plague while in custody of the King of Munster at Cashel. It would have been very injurious to the King's honour and a grievous cause of reproach had the hostages died in the King's custody. Yet another time Declan, on a missionary journey, was the guest, at dinner, of a wealthy but ill-mannered princeling of South Tipperary, near the Suir. The host, whose name was Dercan, was a pagan, and aggressive at that. Instead of mutton he placed a quarter of cooked dog before his guest. Declan prophetically detected the trick, and Dercan, convinced, received Baptism. Popular tradition, as it is still quoted throughout Waterford, embellishes the incident and improves on the "Life" by adding that the dog, as the saint said grace, returned to life, and leaping off the table made its way over the Comeragh Mountains by the pass called from the incident. Bearna Mhadraidh, or "The Dog's Gap." Moreover, at Dercan's request, Declan blessed near the homestead a certain standing stone, so that if the King of Decies marched around it before going to battle he should return victorious. The pillar stone in question is probably the great cross-inscribed dallán which stands on the summit of the ridge known as Giant's Grave, near Clonmel. Without a doubt that procession round the pillar stone was originally a pagan custom, and in recording the incident our ancient historian has, all unconsciously, transmitted an echo of a heathen rite, and, without intending it, given us a proof of his own historical accuracy. Procession sunwise (*deiseal*) around a dallán (pillar stone) or a stone circle was an ancient Irish (perhaps a pre-Celtic) ceremonial of pagan times. At Tara, for

10 *Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials*

instance, was the *Deiseal Teamhrach*, a dallán, or stone circle, around which the army of the High King marched to ensure success in its expedition. Once, when travelling through Ossory, Declan came to a village, Kilcolum, where he proposed to lodge for the night. The churlish inhabitants would not, however, receive him; they went even further and drove the stranger forth with hard words, if not with blows. Declan prayed vengeance from heaven upon them, and that night forty-eight of their number, participators in the act of inhospitality, died! A woman, not noted for her honesty, came one day to Declan's monastery, and while there, she committed a theft. On her way home the earth swallowed her up, at the same time casting out the stolen article, which promptly turned into stone! The petrified object was still shown at Ardmore when the "Life" was written, and it was preserved in the monastery for ages as a warning to evildoers! The saint was once crossing the fertile plain of South Tipperary which lies between the Galtee (*Sliabh gCrot*) and Knockmealdown (*Sliabh gCua*) ranges when he met, on the way, a man carrying an infant for Baptism. Declan miraculously procured salt for the ceremony, and the infant, then made a Christian, lived to become St. Ciaran, founder and patron of Tubrid. St. Ciaran's Holy Well at Tubrid is still, or was till recently, a centre of devotion, beside the spot where repose the ashes of great Geoffrey Keating. A hostile fleet of foreigners—Tentons, most likely, or Gauls—put into Ardmore Bay on one occasion with intent to sack the settlement and church. Ultan, a cleric, however, at Declan's command, held up his left hand against the strangers, and, lo, the ships sank like lead in the waters while the crews were turned into the rocks that stand high out of the sea near the mouth of the bay! A messenger of Patrick's, Ballin by name, was, once on a time, sent from Armagh to execute a commission for his master. It so happened that before he reached Ardmore he was drowned in the Lickey River near the crossing place of the latter at Aghmacuraveil, not far from Declan's monastery. At Declan's prayer, however, the dead man was restored to life, and lived to return safely to Armagh and to relate to Patrick all that had befallen him.

It is singularly unfortunate that, while prodigal of miracles

and the marvellous, the "Life" is so niggard of fact. Students of Irish hagiography are, however, quite familiar with the phenomenon. Legend and romance are ever so much more attractive to the Irish mind than cold facts, however important! His biographer does, indeed, tell us that Declan once journeyed to Britain, which is credible enough; that this visit was in the time of St. David, which is incredible; and that he went more than once to Rome, a statement which we may well be pardoned doubting. He tells us, moreover, that the saint preached through the length and breadth of Decies, and that he founded churches and monasteries all over the region. That the last statement is substantially true we have some independent evidence, *scil.*, the testimony of tradition as embodied in place-names and other monuments, etc. Characteristically enough, like a loyal clansman, Declan seems to have regarded his mission as not extending beyond his own tribal territory. Possibly he considered that his charity should commence at home; anyhow, we do not read that he ever carried his preaching outside his own people. Ardmore was the parent church to which the other churches and religious establishments of Decies owed allegiance. The exact character of the bond which united them we do not know; we may, however, regard it as fairly certain that the general discipline was identical with the contemporary Church system of Britain and Gaul. In the mother church of Ardmore its founder received many disciples, not only from his own territory, but from all parts of Ireland, and already, before his death, the holy city of Ardmore had become famous, so that pilgrims from distant provinces came hither to be edified and instructed. The general reader may require to be reminded that the typical Irish Monastery was a collection of small wooden, or wattle, cells and diminutive churches—the whole surrounded by a *caiseal*, or circular wall of dry stone; sometimes, as along the treeless western seaboard, the cells and churches were also of uncemented stone.

Successive chieftains (the Irish called them kings) of Decies holding office, or reigning, during Declan's apostolate were Ledban, deposed because he remained obstinate in paganism, Ferghal MacCormac (from whom, or from whose descendants, we may have the present Rathgormack), and

Cinaedh. Far as one can glean from the documents, the princes or kings of Decies did not have a fixed official place of residence. The prince for the time being lived either in his family *dun* or in some *lios* or stronghold of his choice. Perhaps more frequently still he abode now in one place and again in another as circumstances made convenient or necessity compelled. Cineadh's *dun* we are able to locate by means of the "Life;" it was almost certainly at Crohane, in the neighbourhood of the present Newcastle, on the Suir.

The relations between Declan and Patrick are not at all easy to determine. There is no reference to Declan in the Lives of St. Patrick; but our "Life" of Declan, whatever be its historical worth, is quite positive in its statement that the two saints met; moreover, it specifies place and occasion, and it must be granted that the statement bears the appearance of truth. Patrick, with Apostolic authority, appears on the northern confines of Decies, whither Declan goes—though evidently at first with some reluctance—to meet him. Does it not appear that Patrick's authority is superior to Declan's? It does look, in fact, as if there has been some irregularity or informality in Declan's mission, and that Patrick, with plenary jurisdiction, has come *ad sanandum*, that is, to remove the irregularity and make good the deficiency. The irregularity, I suggest, was *informality of mission*. Patrick comes with authority from the Holy See: all missionaries and clergy within his jurisdiction are to receive and acknowledge him: hence Declan's ceremonious journey to proffer obedience near Clonmel.

Most probably the "Life" records only actual fact when it states that Declan, towards the close of his career, retired for greater seclusion to a little cell which he had made himself, at the spot where now is the ruined church beside the Holy Well. The place is still called Desert, *i.e.*, Place of Retreat. Such retirement, to prepare for the end, is frequent in the case of Irish saints and even at a later time we find chieftains and bishops practising it. Indeed it looks as if many of our Irish saints made formal "retreats" periodically, or from time to time. There is some evidence of the practice in the "Life" of Declan as well as in the Lives of Carthage, Abban, Kevin and many others. Love of retirement and a deep penitential spirit were strikingly marked

characteristics of early Irish Christianity. So seriously did men and women interpret the Gospel counsels that they fled in hundreds—many of them of noble birth—to desert places and to lonely islands of the ocean to find solitude and silence for prayer and meditation upon eternal truths. It was not in his desert, however, that Declan desired to breath his last, but in his monastery, surrounded by his brethren. Accordingly, when the end was near at hand, he had himself carried to the church, and there—having exhorted his community to observance of Rule and submission to authority—he gave back his pure soul to his Creator. It was his disciple, MacLiag (from whom Kilmacleague, in Gaultier, gets its name), who administered to him the Holy Viaticum, and “thus, having banished images and sacrifices to idols, having converted numbers to the true Faith, having established monasteries and ecclesiastical orders in various places, having spent his whole life profitably and holily, this glorious bishop went with the angels to heaven on the 9th day of the Kalends of August.” Declan’s body was buried in the monastic cemetery at Ardmore, and after his death, a little church or primitive “oratory” which still survives, was erected over the grave.

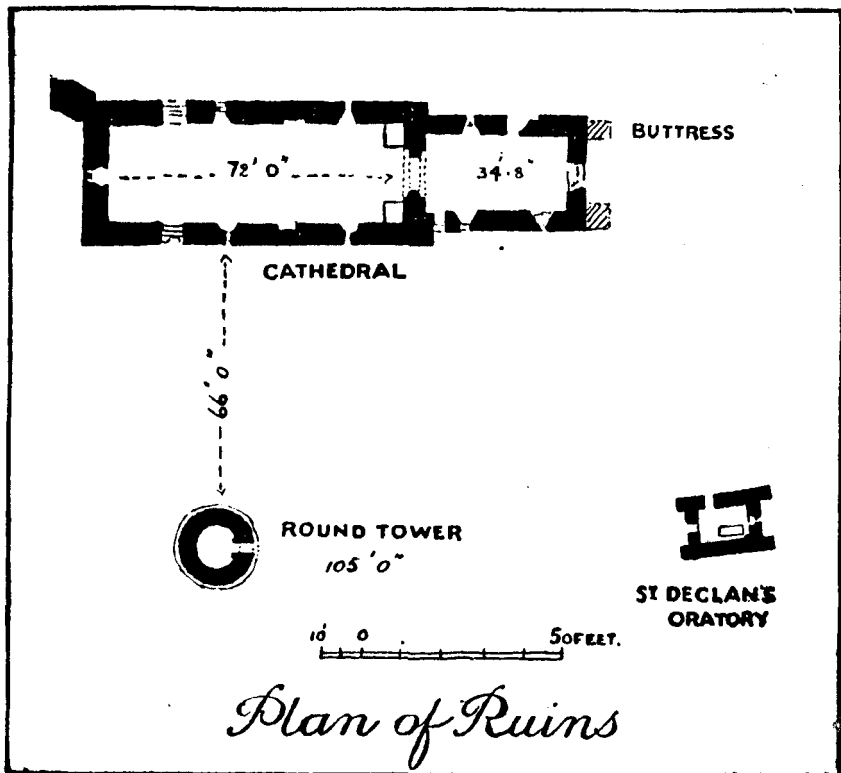
CHAPTER II.

MONUMENTS, &c.

Monuments and ancient sites at Ardmore next claim our attention and, in this new phase of our subject, we can fortunately dispense with mere speculation to a degree impossible in the earlier part; we can, in other words, force the remains to speak for themselves and to tell their own tale. First, we may premise that the records of Declan’s monastery, from the holy founder’s death to the English invasion, are extremely few and scant. Indeed, from the strange absence of reference to it for nearly seven centuries, we might be pardoned for doubting that the establishment was monastic and not rather an association of secular clerics. Even the exact kind of religious, or conventual, rule followed is unknown. True, we have a number of old Irish religious rules, but which, if any, of those was followed at Ardmore,

11 Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials

and with what modifications, we do not know. Not that the fact matters much: the "rules," which were much more elastic and depended more on the will of the abbot than modern rules, differ but little in such essentials as self-denial, obedience, and saying of the psalter. Irish monasticism was



of the *laura* or Eastern, rather than of the Western or Benedictine, type. The monks lived in separate huts or cells which were usually of wood, but often of unhewn and uncemented stone, and, instead of one large church, the community had a number of diminutive oratories—the whole

surrounded by a dry stone wall, called a *caiseal*. A feature more or less peculiar to the Irish monastery was the presence of a bishop amongst the brethren: he was a member of the community and when, as sometimes happened, he was not himself the abbot, he was subject to the latter. In course of time the monastic prelate disappeared as his office became merged in that of the territorial, or diocesan, bishop, with external jurisdiction. Only three bishops, successors of St. Declan at Ardmore, have left a memory or even a name—Ultan, Eugenius and Maelethrim. Ultan is noted in the "Life" as Declan's immediate successor. To Eugenius we have only a single reference: he lived in the 12th century, and his name is found signed, as witness, to an ancient charter. Maelethrim O'Duibhratha is mentioned in the Annals of Innisfallen, under date 1203, in which year he died—having restored or rebuilt the great church at Ardmore.

In our study, or survey, of the remains we can follow their order of relative position or of importance or of age. Let us adopt the last as best accommodated to our historical background. In their order of approximate age the monuments are:—St. Declan's Stone, the Ogham stones, the Oratory or Beannachán, the Cloch Datha, the Round Tower, the Cathedral and the church at Disert by the Holy Well. If we reckon the Holy Well itself, as one of the monuments we may place it anywhere in the above list. Some lesser known remains were certain relics of Declan, also his bell, crozier and a stone called the *Duibhin Deaglaín*, now, it is to be feared, hopelessly lost. To those we may add a baptismal font, preserved at present in the Protestant church at Ardmore.

ST. DECLAN'S STONE.

This is an iceborne block of conglomerate lying on the beach beneath the village; the boulder is supported by slightly projecting points of the underlying native rock. Beneath the two supporting points is left a little hollow, and through this—between the glacial boulder above and the surface rock beneath—devotees painfully crawl or drag themselves on all fours, or rather on chest and stomach; this

16 *Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials*

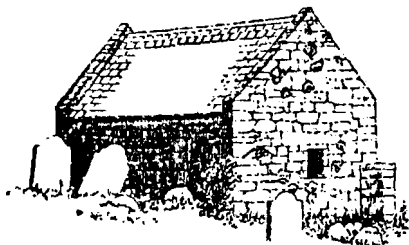
latter ceremonial, which is accompanied by prayer, takes place mostly on the saint's day or on some day within the week of the pattern, and its purpose is to benefit body and soul. Of late years the practice has been mostly given up or it survives merely as an amusement. It is the common belief of the simple Ardmore people that this wonderful stone was carried miraculously from Wales. The story, as told in the "Life," may thus be summarised:—Declan owned a certain black bell which had been sent him from heaven, and this for safekeeping, he had entrusted to a cleric of his named Runan (from whom, perhaps, the two Kilronans within Decies). On the occasion of Declan's visit to Wales, when the party was embarking for Ireland, Runan, in his excitement, forgot the bell which he had laid upon a large stone near the water's edge. It was only when they were already far out at sea that Runan recollected his charge. What was he to do? He was in deep grief at his forgetfulness, but Declan prayed, and lo, by the power of God, the stone, still bearing the bell, on its back, was straightway wafted upon the ocean towards the Irish coast. The rock with its hallowed burden travelled even more quickly than Declan and his brethren; it overtook and passed them on the way and actually, reached Ardmore before them. The boulder to which this wild legend attaches is really glacial, that is, some time in the far away Ice Age, over ten thousand years ago, it was wrenched by ice from its original home in the Comeragh Mountains and, after much pounding and rolling and grinding, after much rounding and polishing, it was at last deposited by the melting ice here at Ardmore. From the wonderful virtues believed to reside in it, coupled with the peculiar rite already described, it is apparent that the stone was originally an object of pagan worship; possibly a local deity or oracle was supposed to dwell in it, and almost certainly—arguing from analogy and the facts already stated—the early missionaries at Ardmore tried to give a Christian turn to the pagan observances. Anyhow—notwithstanding the prayers superadded to the primitive rite—the pattern day ceremonial and the stone somehow associated with Declan are pagan, the one in origin and the other in association.

THE OGHAM STONES.

Two ogham inscribed pillars are set—one at either side—within the Cathedral choir at its west end. A third inscribed stone has been taken away and is now in the R.I.A. collection, Dublin. The larger stone is in the S.W. angle, and its legend has been the subject of much learned discussion. As interpreted by Rev. Dr. Henebry, the inscription, which is perhaps the longest and most interesting ogham legend known, furnished him with the argument on which he hung his theory of third century Irish Christianity. The inscription reads:—“Lugudeccas maqi mucoi Neta Segamonas dolati Bigo esgob” (*i.e.* of Lugaid, son of a man of the tribe of Neta Segamon, a pupil of Bishop Bigus). Thus, in brief, runs the late professor’s thesis:—The date of this inscription, arguing from philological evidence, is c. 250 A.D. Christianity with a Christian episcopate was therefore established in Decies as early as the mid-third century, that is, nearly two centuries before the time of Patrick, and in the reign of Cormac MacAirt. Granting this, we should therefore have two layers of early Irish Christianity—the Christianity of the ogham period, with which some errors of faith were associated, and the Christianity of Declan’s time. The theory is ingenious and ingeniously worked out, but the data are surely insufficient to sustain the edifice that its author has built upon them. Its main weaknesses are two, first, misunderstanding of archaeological evidence, and, secondly, forgetfulness of, or failure to grasp, the fact that oghamic inscriptions are generally and designedly (through literary affectation) written in archaic formulas—antiquated even in their writers’ time: thus an inscription of the fifth century would be cut in Irish of two centuries earlier. Dr. Henebry himself was accustomed to write in the literary Irish of Keating’s day. This remarkable stone, which stands about four feet high, was found embedded in the gable of the oratory, and it is quite evident, from the spawling or chipping to which it has been subjected by the masons, that it had already served its purpose of gravestone when the builders appropriated it. The name Neta Segamonas, occurring in this inscription, is of highest interest. Nia Segamain was King of Ireland (213-207 B.C.), and the person here

commemorated would probably be a descendant of his. Moreover, Segamo was a Celtic war-god, from whom, no doubt, it was believed in primitive times, that a family or tribe of the Desii had its origin. It is interesting also to observe that this same name—apparently a tribe name—occurs in two other ogham inscriptions of County Waterford, *scil.*:—Island and Knockboy.

The second ogham stone, which stands in the opposite angle of the choir, reads simply:—"Amadu," a name which may be equivalent, in its original nominative, with the Gaulish, Amator, and with the Irish, Amait.



St. Declan's Oratory

THE CLOCH DATHA.

This is a cubical block of stone, now lying in the lawn of Monea House, and bearing a deep cavity in its upper surface. Col. Wood-Martin has written some very inaccurate—indeed, I may say, ridiculous—things about this monument, and, worse still, he has been followed by later writers. For one thing, the writer quoted gives a ludicrous derivation of the name; Datha, he understands to be the name of a pagan god. As a matter of fact, Cloch Datha is simply "Stone of the Dye," and the stone owes its name to the fact that the basin was at one time used by the villagers as a rustic dye-bath. Formerly, too, the stone figured in certain local games, for instance, in the now extinct old Waterford custom or ceremony of "drawing the log." The merry-making degenerated into horse-play and indecency, which finally led to its death, before the present generation. There can be little doubt the stone was originally the plinth of a standing cross; it measures $38\frac{1}{2}$ by 18 by 24 inches.

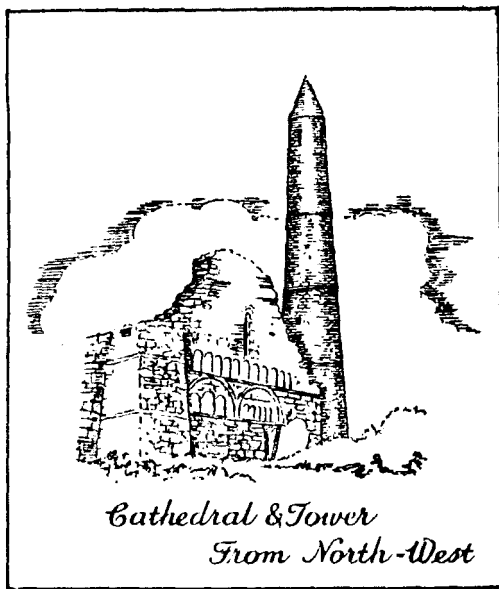
THE BEANNACHAN.

The little building known as the Oratory or Beannachán is one of the earliest Christian structures surviving on Irish soil. Its exact measurements are 13ft. 4in. by 8ft. 9in. on the clear, and the walls are about 29in. in thickness. The upper portion of the side walls and gables is modern restoration; below it can be easily recognised the old Irish masonry—of large sandstone blocks. A minimum use of mortar is apparent and there is no dressing at the quoins. The stoutness of the side walls and the high pitch of the gables were designed to withstand the outward thrust of the original, and no longer surviving, heavy stone roof. In the “Life of Declan” this building is styled the *Levitiana*, a term which the learned Bollandists confess themselves unable to explain. Beannachán signifies, peaked, or rather, the little peaked or horned building, in allusion, no doubt, to the carved finials which once crowned the gables. One window of primitive character—its head fashioned out of a single stone—lighted the little building; this is, as usual, in the east gable; its sides or jambs incline from 2ft. 5 in. below to 2ft. above, and its “light” has evidently been reset, and, in the resetting, changed from its original size. In the west gable is the original doorway—square-headed and heavy lintelled, 5 ft. 6 in. high by from 2 ft. 5 in. to 2ft. 1in. wide. The old doorway is almost entirely blocked up on the outside owing to interments, and the present doorway is modern. Within this most venerable little church is the traditional grave of St. Declan. Generations of faithful clients have scooped out, and carried away, the earth from the saint’s narrow bed, so that the latter has come to be a deep pit in the floor of the ancient building. On the outside the Beannachán exhibits all the well-known features of the oratory—the high gables, square-headed doorway with inclining jambs, small pseudo-arched eastern window, and curious *antæ* or prolongations of the side walls.

A few paces to the west, or south-west, of the Beannachán, and on a site elevated considerably above the level of the

THE ROUND TOWER.

village, the beautifully proportioned Round Tower raises its tapering form to the height of about one hundred feet. The present is indeed, almost certainly, the most perfect specimen of its class—a singularly graceful column outlined in soft-brown sandstone against the more sombre tints of the hill behind. The material of the Tower is not exactly local; it has evidently been carried hither from the Slieve



Grinn range, a few miles away to the north. There is a tale—for the truth of which, however, the writer is unwilling to vouch—to the effect that the original quarry has been found within recent years, with some of the unused dressed blocks lying around. More likely the blocks, if they really exist, are partly dressed pieces left over from the repairs in the latter half of last century. The Tower is divided, on

the outside, into four storeys, marked off by projecting string courses and slight rebates; these latter give the great pillar the appearance of a gigantic marine telescope fully extended. The masonry throughout is of the finest coursed ashlar; in all there are about one hundred and twelve courses, each running from 8 inches to 10 inches high. A conical stone cap of characteristic pattern crowns the structure which, in its turn, rests upon a wide plinth of masonry. Years ago, when it was generally believed that the Round Towers were sepulchral monuments, some Cork antiquaries carried out excavations at the base of this tower—hoping to find there evidence to support their grave-monument theory. Within the circuit of the tower, at its base, they found a skeleton and a half; clearly the remainder of the second skeleton had been found in the way of their foundations by the builders, and had been removed. Local residents will tell the visitor that the present cap is a restoration. Withal, it is the original roof: in the restoration the cap, which had become insecure, was removed piece by piece, and each stone numbered; when the necessary repairs had been effected the stones were placed back again in their respective original positions with the exception of the old finial or coping stone which crowned the summit and had become hopelessly weatherworn. For the original finial the present stumpy cross was substituted. As usual, the door is placed high above the ground level—12ft. 6ins. from the plinth: it is round-headed and has running all around the ope a well-defined band of moulding and bead ornament. Two shallow grooves in the sill are generally regarded as having been worn therein by the ancient bell ropes. Surely, they were receptacles for the top of the ladder, which may indeed have been sometimes of rope. A rope ladder would have been easier to draw up and stow away within the tower. Our door ope is 5ft. 10 in. high, by 2ft. 2½in. and 1ft. 11in. wide at sill and spring of arch respectively. In each of the next two storeys there is a single square-headed ope, and in the fourth storey one round-headed ope of small size. In the top storey are four lights as usual, set approximately to the points of the compass. Of the four, one, the southern, is flat-headed; the other three are triangular-headed without and flat within. Access to the interior of the tower is at present difficult: there are neither

lofts nor ladders, but the older people remember the existence of both. Two features peculiar to the Ardmore Tower are the external beltings already alluded to, and, on the inside, a unique series of projecting stones carved into monstrous heads. From their position it is clear the projecting stones in question cannot have been corbels or floor supports.

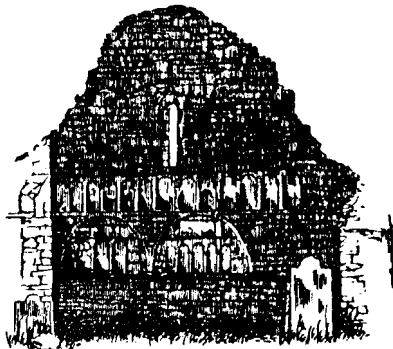
Unfortunately we are without data from which to calculate the exact age of our tower. It is, beyond a doubt, a late specimen—perhaps the very last of the towers; it may, in fact, be as late as end of the 12th century. In this connection, the purpose of the Round Tower may be noted: to serve primarily as a belfry, and secondly, as a place of refuge for the ecclesiastics and for safe custody of books, chalices, shrines and relics. In Smith's time the oaken beam from which hung the ancient bell still remained in position at the top of the Ardmore Tower. Our Tower has a record unique in the history of Round Towers; in the 17th century (1612) it stood a regular siege and artillery was brought to bear upon it. Slightly to east, or north-east, of the cemetery stood the castle of Ardmore which also figured in the siege and of which no trace now remains.

THE CATHEDRAL.

Our next monument in point of age is the great church, which, fortunately, still stands entire—wanting only its roof. Unlike the Tower, which is homogeneous in age and style, the Cathedral is of various periods and many styles—Early Celtic, Hiberno-Romanesque, Idish Transitional, and Gothic. As may be deduced from its varieties of style this is the most generally interesting of all the remains at Ardmore, and, like the Round Tower, it possesses some features which

(From a contemporary account by an officer on the English side—under the Lords Dungannon and Broghill—it appears that on heavy artillery being brought into play against Castle and Tower, there were forced to surrender, and unconditionally, after one day's siege. Of 114 able men in the Castle and 40 in the Tower, 117 were hanged next day; 37 were retained for exchange of prisoners with the Irish enemy; while 183 women and children were allowed to go free.—Editor's note.)

may be styled unique. It consists of nave and choir—without aisles, transepts, chapels, or even tower. In Ireland aisles, transepts, etc., are hardly known in parochial or non-monastic churches of the 12th and 13th centuries. The observant visitor will notice three or four distinct styles of masonry, indicative of as many distinct periods. First, portion (the lower western half) of the northern side wall of the choir, as well as portion of the same wall of the nave, is semi-cyclopean, *i.e.*, of great stones set with a minimum of mortar and uncoursed. This is certainly old Irish work, *i.e.* of pre-invasion times. The theory which would make this section



West Front, Ardmore Cathedral.

See Detail of funnels

of wall part of a church older than the Beannachán is untenable. For one thing, this Celtic building was plainly, like the later (present) church, divided into nave and chancel, and the introduction of the basilica type of church postdates the Beannachán by centuries. Combined length of nave and chancel is slightly over 100 feet. Secondly, the chancel arch and remainder of the nave are late 12th century work—a strange amalgam of Celtic and Gothic which gets the name of Irish Transitional. The latest portions (if we except the buttresses, which are of the 17th century) are the east gable (including its built-up window), the south side-wall and the easternmost part of the north side-wall of the choir, which are of the 14th century or thereabouts. The side windows of the nave, four in number, are pure Irish—round-headed, splaying widely and enriched with mouldings and hoods.

24 *Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials*

The more ornate west window—its transitional character so strongly emphasised—will attract special attention. It is, of course, round-headed, and may be said to consist of two orders of receding columns and arches. The handsome semi-columns of the outer order have disappeared, but the fluted capitals remain, and segments of the pillars decorated with lozenges and pellets are preserved elsewhere within the church. What I have presumed to name the second order is really a very deep moulding bordered by ropework.

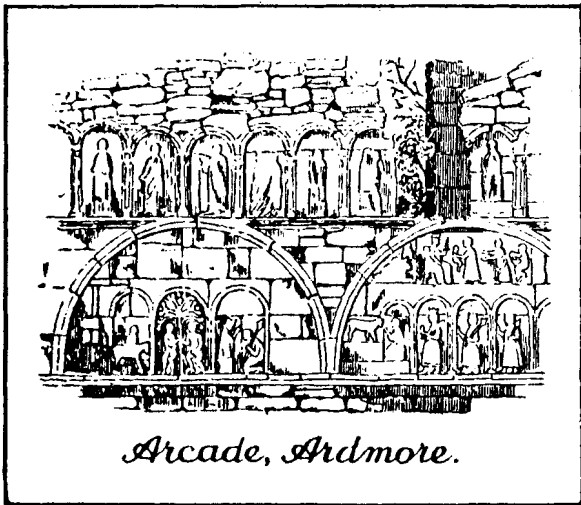
Within the church the chancel arch is easily the most remarkable feature; it is really a beautiful composition, combining grace with massiveness and suggesting beauty wedded to strength. The arch is pointed and has for its supports two heavy semi-columns set upon solid bases and bearing capitals of quite unusual character. One capital (the northern) is decorated in fleur-de-lys design and the other in what appears to be lotus blossoms. The dimensions of the nave are 72ft. by 25ft., and the chancel is about 20ft. wide. Probably, next after the chancel arch, the visitor will be most interested in the interior arcading by which as in Cormac's Chapel, and at Kilnalkedar, the bareness of the north side wall is relieved. The blank space on this wall is broken up into a series of panels with bold stone frames. Some of the panels are square-headed, but others are pointed, and all have stout semi-columns, without capitals, as dividers, at the same time that they rest on one ornamental string course and support another. No doubt the panels were once filled with fresco-paintings. In each side wall of the nave is set an altar tomb—of, probably, the 15th century. There is no such monument in the chancel, but, in the north side wall of the latter, about the spot where in a monastic church we should expect to find the founder's tomb, there is a curious open communicating with a little pocket or passage which runs some feet through the thickness of the wall. The cut-stone mouth of the opening was closed by a slate slab which exactly filled it. What can have been the purpose of this hiding-place? Might it not have been used to contain a relic, like the staff of Declan, which, the "Life" tells us, was preserved for many centuries—almost certainly up to the Reformation—at Ardmore? The hypothesis does sound a little daring; the writer, however, merely offers it in lieu of better. One of the re-

markable details of the Church is the north doorway: this has been much restored: it is round-headed, of two orders, and has foliage-bearing capitals, corresponding to the capitals of the chancel arch and west window. Besides this main entrance doorway there are two smaller doors now built up—both on the south side and facing the Round Tower. Just within the entrance door, lying by the wall, will be noticed the original weather-worn finial of the Round Tower.

Doubtless the external arcading of the nave, with its figure-filled panels is the most striking single feature of the whole ruin. This has been so frequently figured that it must be familiar to many readers. The wonderful series of panels is set in the west gable in a kind of two-storey plan. One—the lower—storey consists of two large semi-circular panels and the other has thirteen smaller panels with round heads. Old Irish iconography and symbolism has unfortunately been but little, and very inadequately, studied. It is quite clear, even to the casual student, that the subjects pictured at Ardmore are analogous to, and in some cases identical with, the figure carvings on the High Crosses. Not only the incidents themselves, but their conventional treatment, are identical, and, doubtless, both—the High Crosses and the Ardmore carvings—belong to the same period. I conclude that the Ardmore figures belonged to a 9th or 10th or 11th century church which preceded our present Cathedral on the same site. Let us take the panels in order and try to read them by aid of our present (very incomplete) knowledge of Irish iconography. Beginning at the top storey and north side, we find two panels empty: doubtless they were once filled like the others, but in removal of the panels to their present position the figures may have been lost or broken—if, indeed, they had not suffered even earlier. No. 3 panel contains a figure much defaced; years ago I read it as a man with a flail, and I have suggested that it may represent Gideon. In the next panel we have a robed ecclesiastic imposing hands on a second individual who kneels before him. No. 5 is a group of two long-robed figures standing face to face; perhaps it is intended to represent the Visitation. No. 6 has a figure of a bishop holding his staff in his left hand. The seventh panel is of slightly larger size than its neighbours.

26 Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials

It has a larger figure (very indistinct), and to the right of this a smaller figure holding or offering a cup. To right of the larger figure, on a level with the head, and resting against the latter, is an object resembling a bird or small animal. In the left hand the figure holds a second object, with a triangular head. No. 8: the figure here is a modern introduction; it was found in the Cathedral during repairs and was, not very inappropriately, reset in the present place by the Board of Works. No. 9: three little standing figures on separate slabs—probably, the three Hebrew children in the Chaldean furnace. The three small figures standing above are the three



royal ministers making inspection and the winged figure at the top is the protecting angel, as on the Cross of Moone. No. 10: the Particular Judgment. Like the General Judgment, this subject is frequent on the High Crosses. There is a suspended balance recording the respective weights of merit and guilt. Attached, beneath, to the scales are little figures of angels on one side and Satan on the other, adding all they can to the respective weights of good and evil deeds. No. 11: seated figure of a king or bishop, with—before him—the

kneeling figure of a youth or female offering something which he holds with elevated hands. The arcades of the lower storey are subdivided—one into three sub-panels, and the other into two groups or incidents, *scil.*, the Judgment of Solomon and the Visit of the Magi. In the Solomon scene the wisest of men himself holds the sword with which he is about to make the equitable division, while, in the background, the incongruous figure of a harper, playing, is introduced. The contents of the second arcade are less easy to interpret, though the centre panel is plain enough—the Fall of Man as represented in the High Crosses of Drumcliffe and Moone.

TEMPLE DISERT.

The very perplexing remains of this large church stand on a level platform, close to the cliff's edge, a half a mile or so to east of the main group of ruins. All that survives is the western gable, south side-wall, and lower portion of the east gable. One feels puzzled by the unusual length of the church—nearly 68 feet internally: assuming the building to have been a votive chapel—as, almost of necessity, it must have been—its size is inexplicable. Any more than the Cathedral, however, it does not appear to have been all of one period. The only remaining features which might help to solve the question of age are the rude west window (high up in the gable) and the flat-headed south doorway with its curious reversed and pin-fastened keystone and rude relieving arch. Apparently the western is the older portion of the building, to which, at a much later date—possibly in the 14th century—the eastern part was added. To west of Temple Disert—about twelve paces from the ruin—is the Holy Well. In post-invasion times, and possibly earlier, the Church of Disert belonged to the Augustinian Priory of Darinis or Molana (Ballinatrav).

CHAPTER III.

THE "PATTERN" AND THE RELICS OF ST. DECLAN.

Strangely enough, the Pattern of Ardmore, though perhaps

the most remarkable celebration of its kind in Ireland, and certainly the most ancient and notable popular assemblage in the Decies, has never been adequately described. Philip Dixon Hardy in his scurrilous booklet, "The Holy Wells of Ireland," has indeed essayed an account of the celebration, but, blinded by bitterness and bigotry, he did not get beyond a malicious burlesque. The Halls' account is more sympathetic and accurate, but its authors were strangers to popular mentality.

How or when the Irish "Pattern" originated we do not know. In all probability its formal rise was subsequent to the invasion in the 12th century. At any rate, native literature of pre-invasion times is lacking in reference to patterns or corresponding celebrations. The well cultus, generally embodied in the pattern, may be Irish; the other observances savour of the Norman. Certainly the cultus of the Holy Well is distinctively traceable in the "Lives" of Irish Saints. In the post-invasion centuries many wells, and also churches, were re-dedicated under non-Irish patronage. In the Wadding MSS., Merchant's Quay Library, Dublin, I have found record of a Papal Indulgence granted in the early 17th century, to a Holy Well in Connacht. Though I cannot, unfortunately, trace the devotion to the Holy Well at Ardmore further back than a hundred and fifty years there can be little doubt that, in one form or another, the devotion in question is more ancient by centuries. It would seem as if in former times the popular patronal devotions centred around the Beannachán and the graveyard rather than around the Holy Well, as to-day. A prominent feature of the celebrations three hundred years ago was the veneration of St. Declan's skull which was preserved in the oratory. Donnchadh Ruadh MacNamara, the poet, has some reference to the Pattern and to the attendance of priests thereat over a century since. Fifty years later Windle (MSS., R.I.A.) notes that the Pattern had degenerated, as such occasions are apt to do, into a carnival of drunkenness and evil behaviour. Abuses almost led to the suppression of the fete; thanks, however, to the local clergy, a ban was put upon the publichouses, and a return to good order was the consequence. Then succeeded a period of bare toleration, or less, during which the Pattern struggled for existence. Finally, about sixty years

since, under a kind of ecclesiastical semi-approval, commenced a revival of the celebration. A little later the Parish Priest, Rev. John Walsh, obtained from the Holy See an Indulgence for the celebration in the church.

The "Rounds" or Stations begin with seven Paters and Aves which the pilgrim recites kneeling before the Well; then he walks slowly three times around the ruin—proceeding *deiseal*, i.e., sunward—and during his ambulation he says the Rosary (five decades) on his beads. Having completed the third circuit, he kneels before the Well, where he finishes, if he has not already completed, his Rosary. A second series of seven Paters and Aves is then added, after which the client of St. Declan may bathe ailing limbs, eyes, etc., in the shallow tank to east of the Well. Finally, as a record of his devotions, the pilgrim scratches with a piece of slate the outline of a cross upon a stone set in modern masonry at the east end of the ruin. The prayers proper at St. Declan's Stone, preparatory to, or after, the unchristian ceremonial there, are, *teste* Windele, five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys.

Though the calendared patron day of Ardmore is July 24th, the principal gathering at the Well, etc., is not necessarily on that day, but on the *nearest* Sunday, unless the 24th itself be a Sunday. This arrangement suggests that the pattern celebration at Ardmore dates from a remote period and before the institution of octaves. Other patterns, like Mothel, are held on the Sunday within the octave, but the Ardmore practice, with which the practice at Ballygunner (Callaghane), Co. Waterford, agrees, is no doubt the more ancient.

It may be accepted as certain that the Holy Well (really a partially dammed-up rivulet) and the ruin beside it mark the desert spot to which Declan from time to time retired. The place is too minutely described in "Life" to leave any reasonable doubt in the matter. The supply of water, though constant, is not great. At present the double basin is arched over by masonry into the summit of which are set three rude figures of the Crucifixion—two of them of considerable antiquity. Other figures formerly preserved here are alleged to have been destroyed in 1831 by some local sopers. The

30 *Ardmore; its Founder and Early Christian Memorials*

unique carvings in the Cathedral gable, by the way, suffered from the same sectarian bitterness, at the same time and in the same way. A certain magnate of the immediate locality laid irreverent hands on one stone, but it fell on him and broke his leg! (Windele MSS. R.I.A., 12, I. 3.)

The Bell of St. Declan is referred to as existing in the 17th century, or, at least, when the "Life" was written four or five hundred years earlier. Its legendary origin is thus recorded:—Declan, returning to Ireland from Rome, was one morning beginning Mass in a church by the wayside when there was sent to him from heaven a little black bell which entered through the window and rested on the altar in front of the celebrant; this heavenly gift the saint committed for safe keeping to a disciple of his, Runan by name, who is said to have been son to the King of Rome, *i.e.*, a foreigner of Patrician birth. For reasons to be given presently I think the Bell and the Duibhín Deaglain are identical, and that the object was not really a bell at all, but a small cross-inscribed piece of stone.

Duibhín Deaglain, which I venture to identify tentatively with the Bell, was a thin and flat piece of black marble—about two inches square. It is reputed to have been found in the saint's grave. The Duibhín survived till the middle of the last century, when it was used as an amulet against cattle disease. When last heard of, this relic was in Dunganran, in possession of a member of the Williams family, and, for all that the writer, by repeated enquiries, could discover to the contrary, it perhaps remains in the same place and custody still. The Duibhín, after the manner of amulets, was bound around by a slender metal clamp, and bore on one face a circle, and on the other an inscribed cross. There was, also, on the face of the stone, four or five small holes counter sunk for rivets. A detailed description of the curious relic, with an illustration, appears in the *Kilkenny Archaeological Journal*, Vol. III., New Series, p. 47. William Williams has explained the name Duibhín—Duibhmhionn, black relic—but does not Duibhín, little black object, seem equally, or more, probable?

Why do I suggest equation, or identification, of the modern

marble Duibhín with "Declan's Bell" of the "Life"? First, because, on testimony of the "Life" the bell was called *duibhín*, the very name applied half a century since to the stone object. Secondly, because the Irish "Life" (Brussels original) indifferently calls the object sent to Declan from heaven *cloch* and *clocc* (clog). In one sentence the object is said to be a bell, and in the other, a stone; it is quite clear that in one of the two cases there is a scribal error. It is true that in my edition of the "Life" I have translated the word—bell in both cases. Further thought almost convinces me I ought to have made it stone in both instances. Lastly, because in another passage of the "Life" (C. 30) the word *clog* (*clocc*) is actually written in error for *cloch*.

From one of the two references in the "Life" it would appear that Declan's staff, called the "Fearthach" or "wonder-working," was also preserved at Ardmore. At any rate, the compiler seems to imply that the relic existed in his day. And, if in the original writer's day, why not in Michael O'Cleary's time, for Brother Michael copies the statement without comment!

A further relic of the saint, long preserved at Ardmore, was his skull—also alleged to have been found in the grave within the Beannachán. The skull, in the early years of the 17th century, had become so worn and infirm from great age, much handling and long exposure that, in the year 1642, it had to be sent for repair to one Hercules Beer, silversmith, of Youghal. A MS. History of Youghal, written by Thomas Cooke, Clerk of that place, about the middle of the 18th century, and quoted by Hayman, is responsible for the story: Under the silversmith's hammer the head crumbled so to pieces that repair became impossible. Thereupon the dishonest silversmith substituted for the original relic the skull of one John Dromada, a felon, who a short time previously had suffered the extreme penalty of the law at Youghal. Upon the substituted skull Beer put a silver plate as if he had repaired it. The fraud was, however, soon detected but, in all probability, not before it was too late to recover the original fragments. All this goes to show—if it proves nothing else—that the cult of Declan was a very living actuality in Ardmore three hundred years ago, as to-day,

when perhaps no other Irish saint has so pronounced a local and popular honour as St. Declan.

Only one monument, or relic, of ancient Ardmore remains to be named. This is the baptismal font of early Tudor times, now preserved within the modern Protestant Church. The font is octagonal, as practically every baptismal font was before knowledge of ecclesiastical symbolism had died out in the Irish Church. The number eight symbolises regeneration. Its decoration enables us to date this interesting and venerable article of church furniture as approximately very late fifteenth century work.